

Fish and Game head says safeguarding environment protects farming as well

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By Heather Hacking, staff writer

RICHVALE - Ryan Broddrick, the new head of the California Department of Fish and Game, urged farmers to keep up progressive tactics to protect the livelihood of agriculture while safeguarding the environment. Broddrick was among the guest speakers at Western Canal Water District's annual grower meeting, where district members, mostly rice growers, are given the status of the irrigation district and share lunch. Broddrick, who has had the job for about a month, was appointed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. He worked in the Department of Fish and Game for more than 20 years, beginning in 1981 as a game warden. In 1997 he was appointed chief deputy director in 1997. He left the department in 2001 to join the Western Regional Office of Ducks Unlimited as the director of conservation policy. At Ducks Unlimited, Broddrick has helped form wildlife habitat partnerships between landowners, agriculture, and conservation groups. The issues are complicated, Broddrick said, and a tight budget means it will be tough for the department to get everything done. To illustrate the complexity of Fish and Game's operation, Broddrick explained that earlier Tuesday morning he was at Santa Cruz Island, off the coast of Ventura. The meeting was about five species of foxes that are being closely monitored to try and protect them. Extensive biological research has been conducted over the past four years, Broddrick explained. The problem is that the No. 1 "limiting factor" for the foxes is that they are being eaten by Golden Eagles, another protected species. "The reality is we have a conflict within the species," he said. Broddrick commended members of Western Canal for building fish screens along the irrigation system and recognizing where conflicts with the environment could occur. He said growers have also contributed habitat for species such as the spring-run chinook salmon. It's hard to see in sparsely populated Northern California, but the demands on natural resources in the state is huge. Broddrick said he went to a boat and sportsman show in Long Beach recently where there were 250,000 in attendance. Due to the large numbers of people who want to hunt and fish, some opportunities have been reduced, such as shorter seasons and reduced bag limits. Broddrick said it's important for people to understand that working together is what is needed, such as work contributed by the irrigation districts. The Department of Fish and Game is not currently a priority for general fund spending, he said. "The duties didn't go off the table, just the funding." Many positions have been frozen as people have retired. With 47,000 acres owned by Fish and Game just in the Sacramento Valley, "their ability to serve the public has changed dramatically." There are only about 200 Fish and Game Wardens left in the state, down about 60 just recently, he said. Right now, he said he's focusing on pinpointing "safety net programs what we provide that no other agency can." He said he has confidence in the leadership of Schwarzenegger and believes the governor has a sincere desire to fix problems in a new way. He said staff is really interested in promoting more understanding of different interests in the state. Another speaker at the event was Dan Keppen, executive director of the Klamath Water Users Association, who has been in the middle of water battles since taking his post in the Klamath area a few years ago. Keppen said his group, which in 2001 had long-used irrigation waters shut down to protect fish populations, and growers there have been battling the perception that farmers harm the environment. However, Keppen said he is feeling more optimistic the past six months, especially with Gov. Schwarzenegger's appointments. He said the appointment of Michael Chrisman as state resources secretary was a good move and the man understands the issues. Ted Kulongoski, governor of Oregon, has been good to work with on Klamath issues, Keppen said. Kulongoski understands that rural economies are reliant upon agriculture, Keppen said.